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CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ARTISTS:  
SIR WILLIAM ORPEN  
*General Editor:* ALBERT RUTHERSTON







THE DEAD PTARMIGAN. SELF-PORTRAIT. (1909). Oil. *In the possession of Colonel Pöe.*

# SIR WILLIAM ORPEN

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**T**HE brave dawning of a fine day, a palette of joyous colours, a catholic eye for things paintable and a ready and just hand to paint, would seem happy gifts. Really, such gifts hold the key to no such simple Paradise as would first appear, for the fashioning of works of art demands much reverence in these modern days of speculation and æsthetic theory. In the beginning, when a flat surface was obviously a suitable thing to be decorated, and a stone a place to scrawl with intriguing shapes, artistic conception meant no more than an attempt to capture within the confines of a line something seen or dreamed. Even then, this affair was fascinating enough to make a man's fingers eager to hold and dominate tools to scribe the rock face, and pattern spears and paddles with twists and curls and straight lines which in some curious way were pregnant with the mysteries of life and living. There were a thousand things to draw, cults and creeds were non-existent, as were art critics, and possibly to this unchastened ignorance, the curious vitality and expressiveness of primitive art is due. In some part the position was an enviable one. The savage, musing over the forces which gave him breath, made him happy with the sun's rising

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and afraid at the fall of dark, must have found strange pleasure in this faculty, slowly awakening, to limn something of the eager inquisitiveness, the wonder and fear and nascent belief that animated him. Nevertheless, artistic expression is heady wine, and it has needed but a few short centuries of sophistication to send truth stumbling down many an ugly side-path, with her followers in more or less dignified attitudes down every by-way, loudly claiming to have been the last to see the hem of her garment. In this dilemma of misguidance stands the painter of to-day.

Throughout the bewilderment of modern artistic vogues, Sir William Orpen has found expressive salvation by implicit trust in the material of his craft and its workmanlike use. Paint has apparently proved to him almost as facile an expression as speech, and from his earliest student days there has never been any doubt of his possession of an outstanding and astonishing fluency in handling almost any artistic medium. His concern has constantly been, not with the vexed questions of what is legitimately paintable, but with the various painters' problems of colour, design, light, spacing, and what not, and wearisome æsthetic quibblings have left his confidence undisturbed.

An intense preoccupation with the fundamental necessities of good craft and the attendant assurance which rides with complete mastery of material, is a quality discoverable in

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practically all the admitted greatest works of art, whilst the realisation of, and feeling for the qualities of the material is one of the hall-marks of good practice. This importance of right feeling for material is perhaps more easily recognisable in considering other crafts wherein the substance is less easy of manipulation than paint. Wrought iron, bronze, or wood demand more obvious licence than any pictorial medium, but it is a curious and inevitable fact that expressive reality is always gained more fully when the limits of easy tractability are recognised and used, rather than when the material is tortured beyond its limit of expressive usefulness. Most substances can with patience and wearisome skill be coaxed far beyond their legitimate artistic purpose, but the spirit of such a work is almost invariably obscured by the forced dexterity with which the material is handled. The material is seen first, last, and always, and whatever reality should have been expressed is entirely lost in a dazzle of technical fireworks. The carvings of Gibbons copy the forms of leaves and fruit and game with an astounding faithfulness to imitative appearance, but fail entirely to produce any feeling of actuality. All feeling is absorbed in wonderment that it should be possible to carve wood into such frail and delicate shapes. Examine, on the other hand, the enormous vitality of a rough figure-head gouged from a block of oak ; quite frankly a mask cut in hard stuff with difficult tools. It may be as rough as you

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please, so long as it is cut in a sensible way, and yet the feeling is all for the truth and fitness of the thing. It is a personality, guiding and alive, brooding over mysteries, not wood at all. Similarly, in all painting where the material is considered pre-eminently, and a certain nice adroitness is visible in its handling, there is the steadfast feeling of genuineness, and a relief that there is no attempt to make things appear what they are not. No amount of realistic imitation of appearance can express truth, unless stated with a punctilious regard for the requirements and limitations of the materials of expression. To be explicit at all, a painting must be first a statement in paint. Unfortunately, paint is a material which may well run easily into the way of imitative abuse.

Nevertheless, it is not enough that a picture shall be beautiful only to brother painters, and a picture which is a technical exercise in the use of paint alone is in itself of little real value, giving comparatively as little pleasure as the dexterous performance of a series of chromatic scales. The business of an artist is to reveal something which is not common knowledge, or within the scope of common vision, and whether the fret and flame come from a voice in the wind, the dawning and the dusk or the tears of humanity, matters little if only that passionate moment be seized and expressed. The problem of all art lies in this, and perhaps of all arts that of the painter is the most difficult from one point of view.

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Passionate vision is a transient thing, and if that vision is to be recorded, there must be an extremely adroit and facile noting of the essential things which shall retain vision. Without a supreme control over the technique of craft and expression, the first clarity of seeing cannot be maintained. Stumbling and imperfect technique means inevitably a frittering away and loss of lucidity, and what was a clear fair story becomes the "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

It is owing largely to his essential mastery of both medium and technique that Sir William Orpen has been able to express with completeness and assurance the extraordinary range and variety of emotional inquisitiveness with which his destiny endowed him. His earliest training was very rigidly academic, bounded and suppressed by the austere ideas of form and proportion which then commonly prevailed throughout the provincial schools of the country. Nevertheless, this unregenerate schooling did ingrain an appreciation and respect for the qualities of just form and accurate if emotionless proportion, which must admittedly be a useful part of a painter's equipment, whatever his subsequent views as to their position in the scale of his expression. Freer days followed this period spent under the régime of orthodox draughtsmanship, and Orpen joined the Slade school, which was then at a particularly brilliant period in its history.

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Draughtsmanship was a common enough possession, and it needed a very big fish indeed to create a splash in such a pool. Nevertheless, Orpen achieved this difficult task, and left the Slade in 1899 distinguished by his novel treatment of the summer composition of that year. The idiosyncrasies of this particular composition "Hamlet" were in many ways significant of a particular side to his outlook which foreshadowed the trend of much subsequent work, and gives to a great extent a hint of qualities which have subsequently held for him great fascination and allure. "Hamlet" is a perverse and wilfully wayward comment on a well-worn historical subject. It is an avoidance of the apparent and accepted manner, and in this avoidance, were it revolt against formality or merely a ruse to escape into more self-appealing subject and to play with happier properties, the result is certainly provocative. Throughout the extraordinary conglomeration of warring elements, the attainment of anything approaching a harmonious whole is a fantastic problem, and a problem overcome with remarkable and scrupulous ability; for to assemble such a bizarre collection of puppets, dress them in the odds and ends of a demented costumier, setting them cheerfully malaport in the interior of an old Islington theatre, is a fine feat of bravado, and the work of a satirist. Though it may be suspected that "Hamlet" was painted with a certain ironic ostentation and contrivance, there is not the slightest suggestion

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of aught but strict deference to the requirements of thoroughly conscientious craft, and "Hamlet" is a thoroughly painter-like rendering of a whimsically attacked subject, full of impeccable drawing and extraordinarily logical system in tone value. This fidelity to the requirements of good workmanship is characteristic of all Orpen's work, and is particularly grateful in a painter whose research has been and is so varied, for his experiments have invariably been pursued to an equitable end.

In much later work of Orpen's the spirit of banter has persisted, for he is quick to quiz pedantry and satirise ugliness of spirit. Of necessity, in his capacity as a serious portrait painter, much of this faculty has needs been kept in strict abeyance, but many freer works display evidence of an immensely keen and penetrative insight into the peccancies of humanity, and exhibit a power of incisive and vivid comment on the world and its ways. The regret is almost that Orpen has been so thoroughly occupied in painting portraits of celebrities. When all is done and said, the things that live and are appealingly great are the things done out of sheer spiritual necessity, not those done to order or because a job has to be fulfilled. The greatest creation must necessarily be full of the flavour of humanity, for great art is a thing of the emotions, tempered and regulated by intellect and the dictates of craft ; but eventually the austerity and frigidness

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of intellectual statement alone, can never oust the passionate appeal of a mind urged by irrepressible emotion, be it the fire of the reformer or the ecstasy of a Bacchus crushing the bubbles in a wine vat. And simply because of this lack, though a painter must needs paint to order many times, he cannot unflaggingly bring the qualities of zest and delight to his canvas, and equally certainly he cannot simulate interest. It is difficult otherwise to explain the unevenness of performance in many of Orpen's portraits, for intellectual achievement and command of technical requirement remain constant possessions. Though Orpen has achieved success in many varied fields of art, amongst the happiest always remain works which embody the scenic and captious possibilities of mental adventure. "Hamlet" has been noted in this connection, and amongst others touched with the same whimsy spirit are the "Samson and Delilah" drawing, and many of his Irish drawings. Perhaps these latter are amongst his most intimate revelations, for it is naturally with personal knowledge that he speaks. Other more sombre compositions, "The Fracture," "The Knacker's Yard," "The Wash-house," and the portrait of Lady Orpen by artificial light, possess a more dramatic note, full of the foreboding which deep shadowing and focussed light begets. All these contain qualities reminiscent of the theatre and full of a sense of impending adventure.



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There has been, and is, much vexation of spirit and babel of talk about this question of what to paint, and whether the content of a painting matters more than the purely æsthetic problem. The theory that purely formal significance is the only valuable quality in the work of art, is perhaps in many ways an admirable conjecture, but unfortunately purely formal significance is a quality only understandable by a small minority of the average picture audience. People who can disassociate the purely æsthetic from the associated memories of life and human experience, the moment any part of a picture becomes in the slightest sense representational, are so rare, that for an artist to attempt to trust his message to entirely formal expression without the use of representational elements is to bar the door to a vast majority of his audience. Nevertheless, there are purists who would wipe out all representational elements whatever and leave the tale to be told by purely impersonal forms, relying on the flow and rhythm of lines, mass and tone and colour, to state their æsthetic case. Such a theory would deny merit to a few score names which have long been stamped with the hall-mark of artistic genius.

Just how far abstract emotional qualities are advisable as subjects for expression in graphic art is a difficult matter to decide. Paint, after all, is a material most obviously suited to give communication of things seen. If beyond

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the felicity of fine seeing there be other stimulations which have to do with the business of living, and which touch the fringe of mysteries escaping normal vision, well and good. It is the business of an artist to know how to reveal that something extra which is commonly just vaguely sensed, and it is by his developed perception he is able to select his essential facts, arranging them by whatever convention he shall care to choose, of line, colour or form, that hitherto nebulous dreams shall become coherent. This expression is not necessarily confined to the great passions which form the well-head of noble emotions, for æsthetic pleasure is a thing that can be concerned very reverently with the commonest and most humble of subjects—always assuming good faith and an absorption in whatever problem—though, indeed, this assumption is superfluous, sincerity being flame naked and wildly intolerant of disguise. If any message is sincerely and passionately stated with a stark, frank belief in its truth, no work of art can be dismissed as trivial, and it may be well possible that the painting of a smashed and dirty jam jar or an old shoe were of more consequence as a work of art, and embody more real beauty, than an elaborate cogitation on the Nativity. Nevertheless, it would perhaps be difficult to contend that, given equal æsthetic qualities, the two paintings would have equal claims to greatness, for in addition to æsthetic quality there would be the virtue of literary or historical appeal.

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Literary and historical appeal cannot, however, atone for lack of right æsthetic acuteness, for such literary appeal as any work of art may possess varies exactly as the experience noted has been felt by the spectator. The different interpretations of the so-called problem picture vary just as far as vary the personal, intimate, and peculiar experiences of each human observer. Questions of story and incident, likes and dislikes of particular manners or modes, with all their attendant legacies of association, conjuring up the memories of loves and hatreds, lusts, appetites, creeds, and creditors, must almost necessarily warp judgment of a work of art which contains representational elements and which links itself in the slightest way with the problems of everyday workaday life.

The disability to discriminate between the æsthetic and the personal in all art is almost universal. For the majority of people, pure pattern and design in music is almost inseparable from the quick sensuous appeal of associated memories, and it is only in the definitely structurally interesting passages of a fugue, or the crafty variations of some sonata passage, that the presence of design is recognised at all. Unfortunately owing to this almost universal trait, it is almost possible for the tinkle of any cheap, wretchedly written tune, musically moribund, heard for the first time under conditions of extraordinary human stress, to hold for some one person more

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emotional quality than Bach or Beethoven. This association with all its attendant preciousness for one particular person, cannot for a moment, however, raise a beggarly tune into the realms of great art, and unless the one in whom such emotions were raised were entirely ignorant of musical judgment at all, he would doubtless refrain from offering his emotional evidence as a criterion of artistic merit in whatever aroused it. Nevertheless, in lesser degree than outright approval or condemnation, and in more subdivided and complicated ways, the judgment of much music is very greatly dependent upon emotional reactions of this type.

In graphic art the definite design and arrangement of line and mass is similarly commonly missed or confused, and this confusion naturally takes place most in works of art containing the element of representation. Almost universally, a kneeling woman in a picture means a kneeling woman, and not a piece of design. The figure may be intended to convey one of many emotional declensions, dependant for expression on its size, position, colour, or what not, but the great odds are that though the presence of these particular functions may be recognised, the spectator's first curiosity will be for what the woman is doing, and whether she be pretty or not; in fact, it will be the spectator's personal curiosity about any woman, according to his attitude and doctrine. After all, there is no great harm in this, and if the presence of such

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criticism is admitted, an additional emotional factor is gained to the artist.

A rational point of view is that which lies in the direction of a carefully balanced adjustment between the claims of subject and treatment. Provided the subject is firstly admitted to be something to be spoken of in paint, and neither subject nor treatment is so insisted on as to extinguish the other, some surety of judgment may be arrived at—if only the critical attitude towards a picture be that of gauging the problem attacked by the painter. It would seem in fairness that the first reasonable endeavour in judging a work of art should be this query as to the extent and purpose of the painter's problem, for though in its way a piece of still-life painting may be as admirable artistically as the decoration of the Sistine Chapel, there are few reasonable men who would deny the latter precedence in the matter of achievement. When all is done and said, the artist's problem is one he sets for himself, and to condemn a man for failing to achieve solution of problems he has obviously not attempted is manifestly intolerant and unnecessary carping.

Whatever quibblings remain, there would seem one factor commonly established in all great works of art : a preoccupation for design. In all Orpen's work this preoccupation is evident in its widest sense, with all the concurrent ramifications of tone, spacing, and silhouette.

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The quality of orderliness as an emotional evidence is strangely consistent throughout the arts, and almost seems to be one of the necessities of provocative expression. A sense of rhythm and sequence is almost unwittingly present in all moments of mental animation, for wherever speech runs high and fast, unconsciously words go with a lilt and trippingly. Conversely, rhythmic statement produces emotional activity. The reiteration of mill chimneys has a dignity akin to the columns of a temple, and the barbaric fabric of a weaving shed is beautified and patterned justly through the insistence of ordered windows ; the trimness of repeated darks and lights in its myriad window-frames. Still, the full probity of design does not lie in the simple reiteration of pattern alone, for nice spacing and precision, beautiful and useful though it undoubtedly is to a degree, must become wearisome if unleavened. The mosaics and astonishingly fretted carvings of Indian temples leave the feeling of being the work of some highly industrious insect, rather than the intellectual conception of a mind. More is needed before design alone can vindicate itself as a sufficient statement, and mere arrangement of formal elements can never be wholly satisfying.

To adjust the exact relationship between the purely formal requirements of design and the degree of representation of natural forms is not one of the least difficult problems of a painter. Orpen never loses sight of the claims of design, but

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neither does he ever let it interfere with his statement of facts as he sees them. He has never been a red flag revolutionary, reverting to sham *naïveté* and innocence, nor has he thoughtlessly filched the knowledge of tradition without examining it in the light of his personal conviction. That is not to say tradition has played no part in the attainment of Orpen's certainty, nor that his work shows no scholarly influence derived from the great past, for he is essentially receptive to whatever gifts the past has for the modern, but he is also essentially alive to the problems of to-day, and concerned to render into paint the complexities of a complex age. An artist's method and conviction is his own business, his problems are problems he sets himself, and whatever degree of representational accuracy he deems necessary to his purpose, is just so far admissible or desirable as it conveys the message entrusted to it. Always the main merit must remain in the painter's vision and his revealment of it. That this vision is something more than mere copying can ever be, was proved by the advent of the camera, for though the camera copies with a precision, swiftness, and accuracy unattainable by any draughtsman or painter, it does not reveal. Without revealing vision, a picture remains a useless and incompetent thing, whilst with it, a painting of practically any subject at all may be a supreme work of art, a revelation and a thanksgiving. Beauty of subject is not a necessity, and fortunately

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this heresy of the Victorian Age is swiftly dying. A painting of the ugliest woman or most unfortunately misshapen dwarf in Christendom may be, æsthetically, a satisfying and entirely beautiful thing. The one great necessity is that a painter shall see his subject in an illuminating way, with fresh eyes, and shall in terms of his craft convey and reveal to others, less æsthetically alive, his personal vision, and that which is awake in him by reason of his own peculiar gifts and qualities. To a painter so alert as Orpen, the selection and discovery of fit things to paint has held little difficulty, for he sees most matters as intriguing painters' problems, with the additional merit of possessing matter for humanistic comment. The wide range of his work exhibits a constant freshness of outlook and a readiness to attack new problems, together with an almost bewildering diversity and activity in exploring new points of view. Always, throughout the range of his experiments, run the steadying demands of good workmanship. There is no mood or phase which has been left littered and untidily unfinished because of a failure of means to explore, and there is no record of half measures and careless slovenliness. Few fields remain of a painter's activity which at some period or another have not been investigated, pure landscape being the only notable exception.

Amongst painters' problems, those of the painter of portraits must surely take high rank, for the revelation of



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one human soul to others, and incidentally the revealing of one's own at the same time, is a matter to be undertaken with some circumspection. Even presuming it might be possible to find enthusiasm and interest in every sitter who wishes to be painted, the task of a portrait painter, particularly of to-day, is not always enviable, for it is not every man or woman who will offer such self-revelment. It is a subtle business, and just how much of the truth survives the hesitance and sensitiveness of the contact of two personalities is a difficult question. Down the days have come simple, great portraits wherein neither painter nor painted has feared the truth, and in the abiding joy of sheer sincerity, criticism is dumb, and squabbings as to right and wrong, methods and manners are quiet with reverence in the presence of noble sentiment. In all probability the production of the perfect portrait is not entirely within control of the painter alone, for his sitter must be content to be set down as accurately as one man can invest himself in another. He should be agreeable to criticism without shame, nor swollen with undue pride, content to be appraised and recorded, fairnesses, blemishes and all, confident in justice ; his hat in hand or on his head as is his custom ; seated in his office or his home, with neither more nor less cushions than it is his usual wont and habit ; sat at his ease in the surroundings familiar and comfortable to him. If he be pompous, and proud of his pomp, by all

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means clothe him in his happy civic splendour, with brave scarlet for background and his robes of office resplendent on him, but let him find no cavil that his pride is plain to the painter, and let him accuse no man of malice for seeing him right. That would seem to be a hopeful way to the beginning of a good portrait, but unfortunately it is a state of affairs which does not often obtain, and your portrait painter is handicapped from the start; for far too often must some traits be hidden, little weaknesses masked, and unhappy traces of imagined real or unreal flaws be thrust discreetly under the cloak of propriety, for your modern Englishman is as shy of self-revelation as a schoolboy with his first lover. If one could be sure how much of a poor portrait is due to influence on the part of a sitter and how much or how little of this necessary confidence existed, possibly much of the disparity between portraits by accredited and admittedly skilful painters might be explained. To see accurately and even render on to canvas accurately is not sufficient to make a portrait. If that were the case, a photograph would obviously make a better portrait than a painting—but it doesn't. The difference is in comment, and thus though there are great numbers of accurate draughtsmen and able painters as far as that goes, there are not a great number of fine portrait painters, for in addition, portrait painting demands the quality of swift human insight and human sympathy. This quality

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is another of Orpen's gifts—perhaps one of his greatest, for his best portraits display an extraordinary grasp of character and an almost uncanny knack of seizing the essential outward and visible signs which give the key to character. Technically his portraits are brilliant; full of verve and style, complete and assured in modelling and handling, and almost invariably well placed and designed. In them all is a thoroughness of modelling which is remarkable. No detail of form is left unrendered or unpursued, and every delicacy and intricacy of tone and colour is worked out to its logical and inquisitive end, yet without any disturbance of the final suave unity. This unity is only possible in a painter who, throughout his exploration of detail, always retains an all-over conception and makes detail subject to the demands of that conception. Thus, though Orpen's portraits are extraordinarily full, the detail never obtrudes, and though rich with research always maintain entire coherence. Apart from technical questions, however, it is in his catholicism of interest that Orpen is able to reveal so much more than the average portrait painter. Not all his portraits are good, for though a man may paint a portrait to order, he cannot wake an enthusiasm to order, and neither can he hide the fact. Though the revealing of one human being to others—and this incidentally includes self-revelation—may well be truly a touchy business, Orpen has never shirked the responsibility, if he has had interest;

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but since there must be times when enthusiasm will not be whipped, some portraits fall below his attainable standard. Fortunately, Orpen knows little intolerance in his choice of paintable subjects. He has always found grace in a wide miscellany of folk, and though perhaps one of his most amazing portraits is of a chef, he has needed no queerness of types to achieve distinctiveness, for he has painted broadcloth with the same arresting sympathy. Wherever mind, hand, and spirit have been at one business the result has invariably been a notable one.

Though Orpen can paint dignity and office with a sure hand, it is perhaps in a more intimate type of portraiture he is seen at his best ; particularly in portraiture which gives more than a hint of a man's environment and shows him in his own private and comfortable surroundings. A charm exists in portraiture of this type impossible to achieve in modes of more reserve and austerity. Civic pomp, brave dresses and the gold and jewels of massy honours and high office are very well apt to get between reality and truth. One sees the robes first and the man second ; cries of acclamation at the sight of high dignity and personage are apt to sound loud in one's ears, to the detriment of measured judgment of character or the like or dislike of personality. It is the office one sees, not the man. There is more quietude and more to be learned when one sees him in his own house, his dog

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by his side, quiet among his books or with the tools of his trade in his fingers. Times, manners, and customs are there plain to be speculated on and mused over, and humanity is more sincere ; a vessel for sorrow or laughter, for hope or fear, with eyes restless with the incipience of love, or quiet with the knowledge of age.

Since happiness in a task is a matter not to be easily hidden, some of Orpen's interior groups are amongst the subjects which have received his preferential approbation. In a group like the delicious comment, "The Nicholson Family," it is difficult not to feel the extreme accord of painter and sitters, and the amiable goodwill to be portrayed, with a trust in fair dealing. It is a type of portraiture which almost disarms criticism by frankness, but it is the frankness of revealment, and the frankness of delight in revealing rather than ingenuousness. There is much candour, but also very much craft, and only the exquisite union of the two makes possible so convincing a performance. This establishment of perfect unity between sitter and surroundings is a business in which Orpen has a nice hand. In the portrait of "The Hon. Percy Wyndham" there is again the deft surety in assembling all those accessories which help to illumine personality : books, furniture, letters, and newspapers, but so subordinated to the chief concern of the moment—a statement of individuality, that nothing disturbs, and the

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whole room remains just an emphasis of character in the central figure.

Many of Orpen's self-portraits disclose a zest for painting accessories, and though perhaps in these cases accessories have been chosen with somewhat of perversity, all speak of Orpen's intense delight in paintable properties. After all, since in painting a self-portrait there is entire freedom from limitation, it is but natural that a man should choose the things in which his soul delights; and since the propriety of Orpen's surroundings is of no concern other than that they should form a suitable problem in some branch of painting, many such portraits are sheer delight. A mirror, a latticed window, two or three bottles and a bill or two have formed the setting for several thoroughly engaging exercises of this type. "Myself and Venus" is perhaps one of the most notable, and is an extraordinary study of light, completely assured in knowledge of tone values and arrangement, whilst another mirror portrait, "Leading the Life in the West," displays the same absolute impeccability of tone and feeling for interesting silhouette and design. Other experiments have been painted in open-air settings, in novel costumes, and with a frank delight in impersonation. "The Dead Ptarmigan," "The Jockey,"\* to mention two, reveal admirable

\* "The Jockey" is not reproduced in the present work. It is, however, so well known that reference may safely be made to it.

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qualities of design and preoccupation with textures. Some of these outdoor portraits are probably happier in conception than many portraits painted under stricter conditions in a more stilted atmosphere, stilted in more ways than in a mere matter of *plein air*. Inability to repress his attitude towards a sitter probably is the only reason which can account for the differences of achievement amongst the whole of Orpen's painting, for he is always obviously master of his means. Orpen can paint dignity and fine arresting character. He can paint pomp and he can paint pride, and those people in whom his interest is alive and bright he can paint magnificently, but though he has sufficient discipline to paint to order, he cannot always repress a yawn. After all, a yawn is a significant enough comment. Even when this attitude is felt, Orpen's work is never bereft of style, and though he may be patently opposed to the measured opinion of one eminent painter—that the best and most satisfactory work is done when a definite problem is set by someone else, his work is never slipshod because the problem is one with which he feels out of sympathy. Such discipline is an invaluable asset, and particularly in an artist in such complete command of so facile a medium as oil paint, for the greater the freedom the greater is the need for discipline. With Orpen, discipline of craftsmanship and the demands of good drawing and good painting are never forgotten.

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Though war stirred Orpen very deeply, as is evidenced in his book, *An Onlooker in France*, he avoided the more ghastly and terrible revelations of some other official artists, and though in many of his drawings and paintings of old shattered trenches and dreary landscapes littered and mute with the tragic aftermath of battle he has caught the pity and futility of such struggle, his best work was concerned most intimately with the human comedy and tragedy involved. Quick sympathetic drawings of odd, weary beings, dazed and dumb with the horrors through which they passed ; of groups of peasants living their strange existence fearfully under the guns, or the amazing British soldier released for a moment from the wrack of fighting, lapsing straightway back into his humour and peculiar national philosophy—all these found in Orpen quick and close understanding. Of the actual horror, beyond that suggested to an imaginative mind, he painted little, and it was in painting the latter stages of the world's maelstrom that Orpen was particularly at home. His portraits of persons and personalities of the conferences and meetings are well known, and form a stringently illuminating record and comment upon the pageantry of statesmanship, with its extraordinary complexity, and mixture of majesty and futility. It has been whispered that he found more significance and more qualities worth while in the shimmer of mirrors and the beauty of lights and dancing reflections in



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the great hall at Versailles, than in the collected rows of little black-coated figures gesticulating and interminably arguing in their resplendent setting, but it may be his selection knew the conclusion of ultimate truth.

Whenever Orper is not engaged in his more serious pursuits, and whenever time allows him release from the onerous practice of portraiture or the dramatic and sombre things of living, there always remains his appreciation of the joyous in existence. Anything quick and appealing in colour or light, the fresh charm of sunlight on flesh, the *naïveté* and glee of childhood, and the fragrant zest of all sunny well-being, have found ready response in his art. Some of his portraits of childhood will bear comparison with the greatest studies of that difficult age, and again it is his insight and sympathy which makes the work great. His nude studies are equally well known and magnificently painted. "The Nude," reproduced in this volume, for example, and a host of delightful drawings in pencil and wash, bring the same fine appreciation of delicate form and the beauty of line, careless of ought but sensuous charm and abandon to the frank enjoyment of high spirits.

Throughout the whole range of his varied work, Orpen is first and last concerned most of all with the multifarious activities and rarities of humanity. Always, his most piquant work has been that in which the human comedy has been in

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his view. Incident, dramatic or humoursome ; portraits of people who matter and are worth while, whose features are not simply a mask hiding banality ; and settings which are colourful or suggestive of being occupied and rich with the freightage of living, have always held for him prior appeal. Fortunately he is immensely catholic, and constantly faithful to the demands of his craft, and through a complete mastery of means, his likes and dislikes and his delights have been exquisitely and surely expressed always. Though Sir William Orpen is a man of many honours, and much eminence, his wide appreciation has never dulled, and whether one prefers him as a satirist, a humorist, a dramatist, or just as a superlative draughtsman and painter, there remains the inevitable conviction that he loves the world, and has enough philosophy to gibe at life pleasantly, to laugh at its foolishness and to sorrow at its hurts.

R. P.

## PLATES



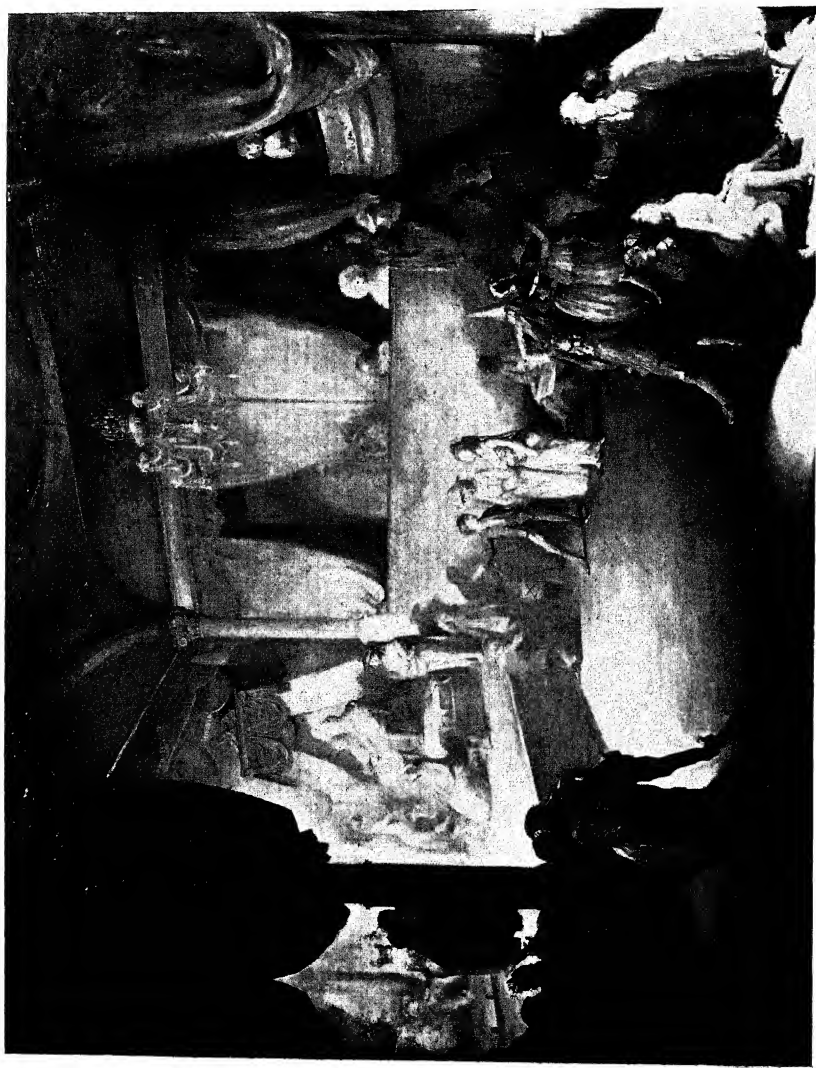


PLATE 1. HAMLET. (1899). Oil. *In the possession of The Marchioness of Chomondaley.*



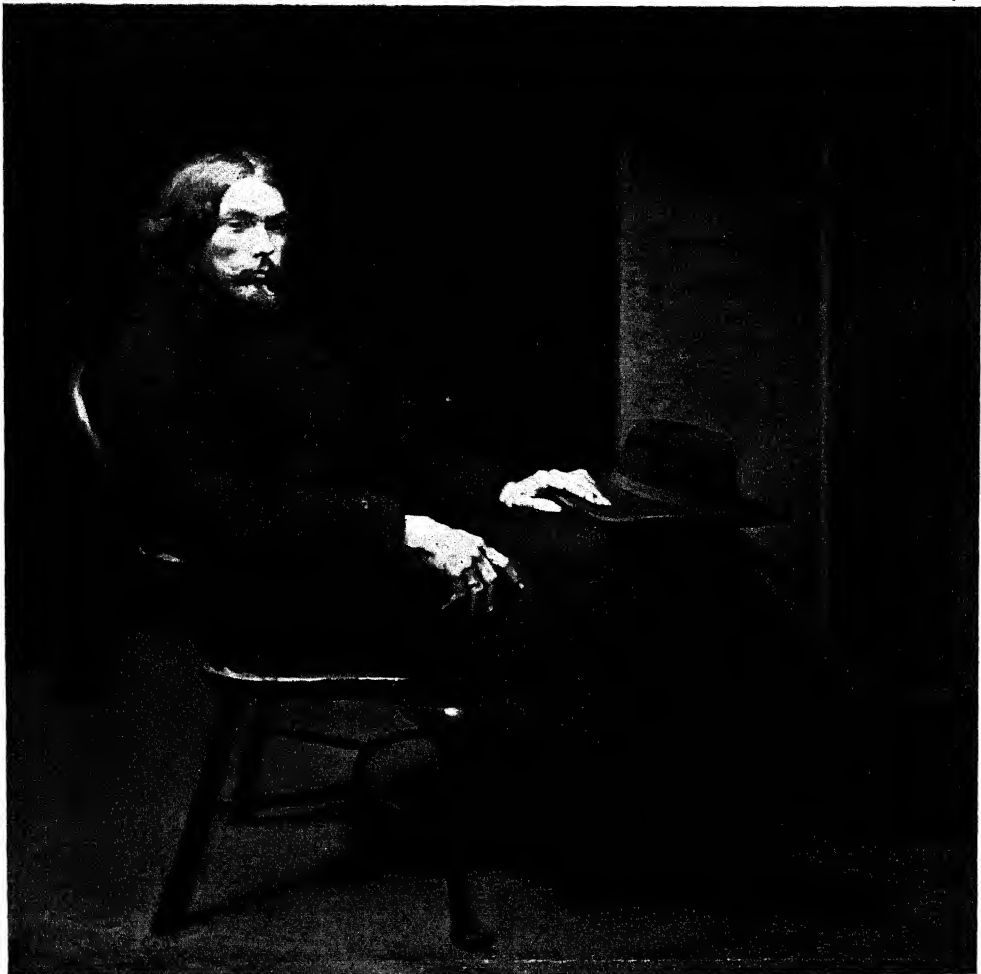


PLATE 2. PORTRAIT OF A. E. JOHN. (1900). Oil. *In the possession of Mrs. Sowerby.*







PLATE 3. THE MIRROR. (1900). Oil. *National Gallery of British Art.*





PLATE 4. SOLDIERS AT CANY. (1900). Oil. In the possession of Colonel John Murray.



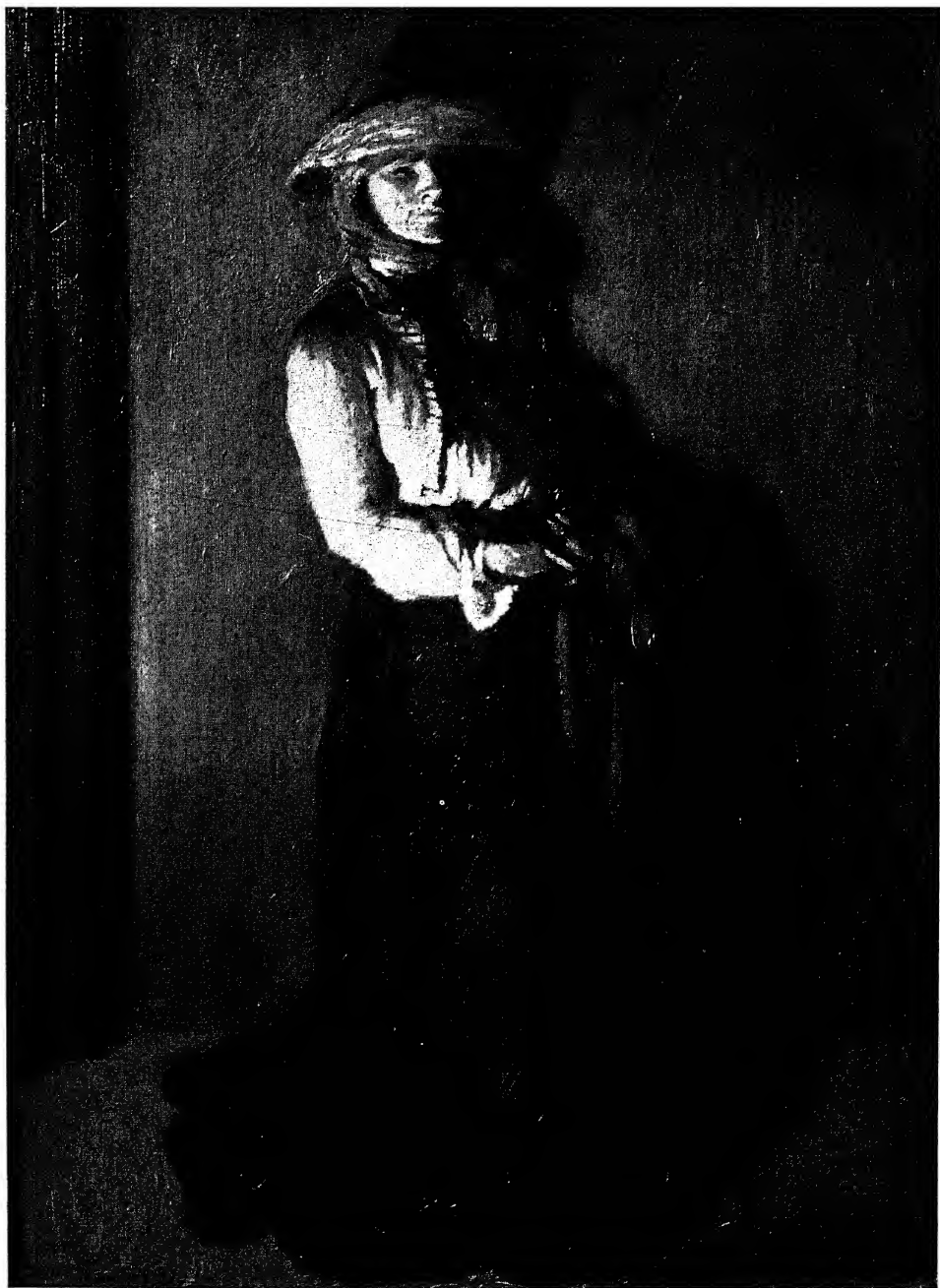


PLATE 5. PORTRAIT OF GRACE ORPEN BY ARTIFICIAL LIGHT. (1901).

*Oil. In the possession of Lieut.-Colonel F. D. Samuel, D.S.O.*





PLATE 6. THE FRACTURE. (1901). Oil. *In the possession of G. Blackwell, Esq.*







PLATE 7. THE WASHHOUSE. (1905). Oil. *In the possession of Mrs. Sam Wilson.*





PLATE 8. LADY ORPEN. (1907). *Oil*



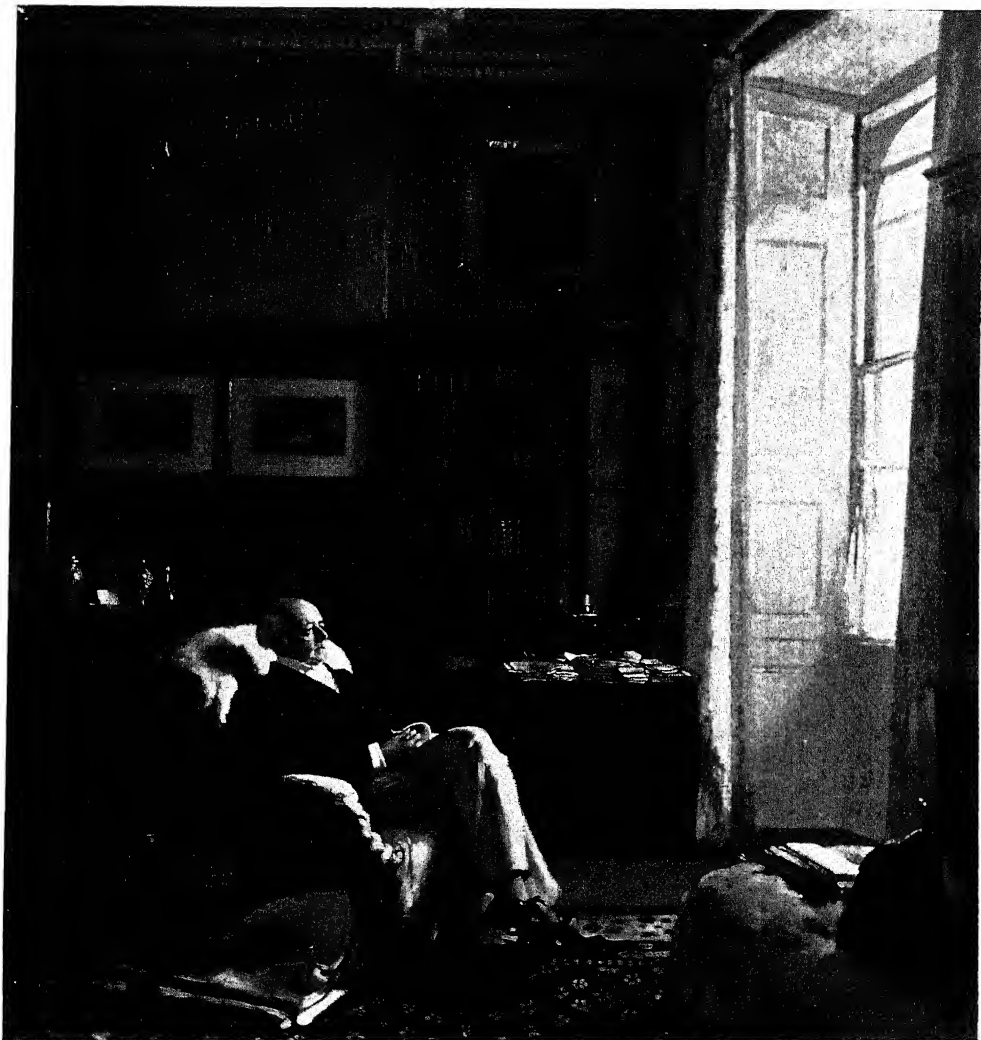


PLATE 9. THE HON. PERCY WYNDHAM. (1907). Oil. *In the possession of the Wyndham family.*





PLATE 10. THE NICHOLSON FAMILY. (1907-1909). Oil.

*In the possession of the Scottish Modern Arts Association.*







PLATE II. HOMAGE À MANET. (1910). Oil. Manchester City Art Gallery.



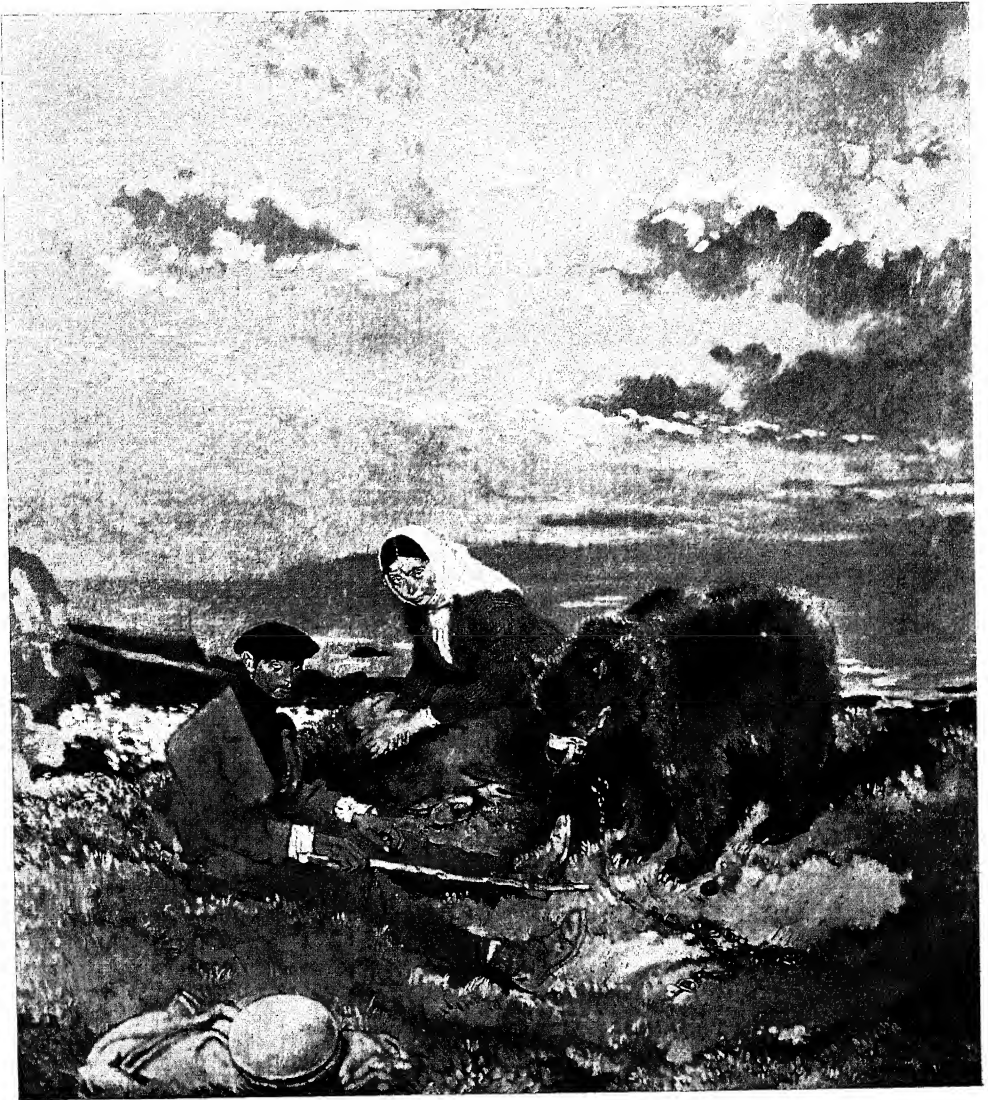


PLATE 12. HUNGARIANS. (1910). Oil. National Gallery, Johannesburg.





PLATE 13. MYSELF AND VENUS. (1910). Oil. Carnegie Institute, Pittsburg.





PLATE 14. A NUDE. (1910). Oil. Tokio.







PLATE 15. ON THE IRISH SHORE (FAIRY RING). (1911). Oil. National Gallery, Johannesburg.



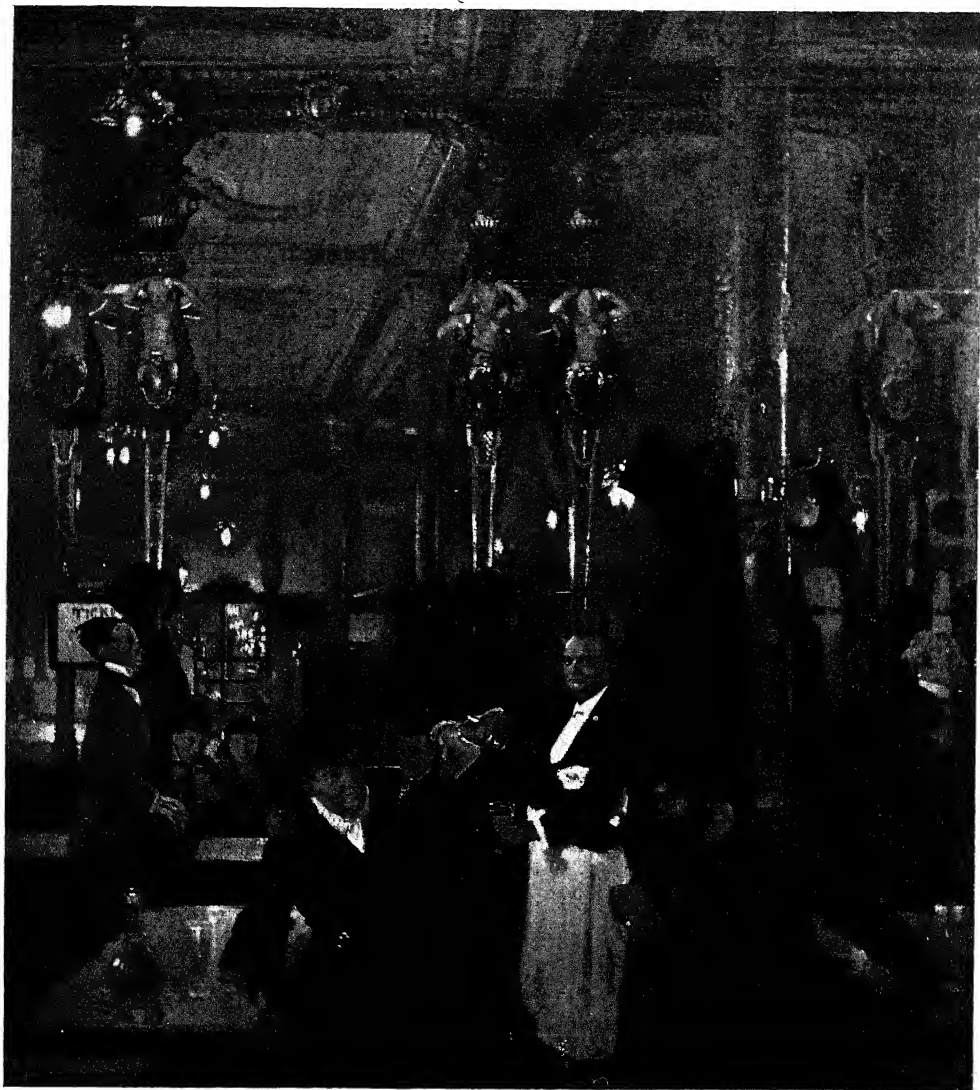


PLATE 16. THE CAFÉ ROYAL. (1911-12). Oil. Musée National du Luxembourg, Paris.





PLATE 17. THE BLUE HAT—MRS. J. M. HONE. (1912).

*Oil. Formerly in the possession of the late Wm. Vivian, Esq.*





PLATE 19. LEADING THE LIFE IN THE WEST. (1914). Oil. Metropolitan Museum, New York.





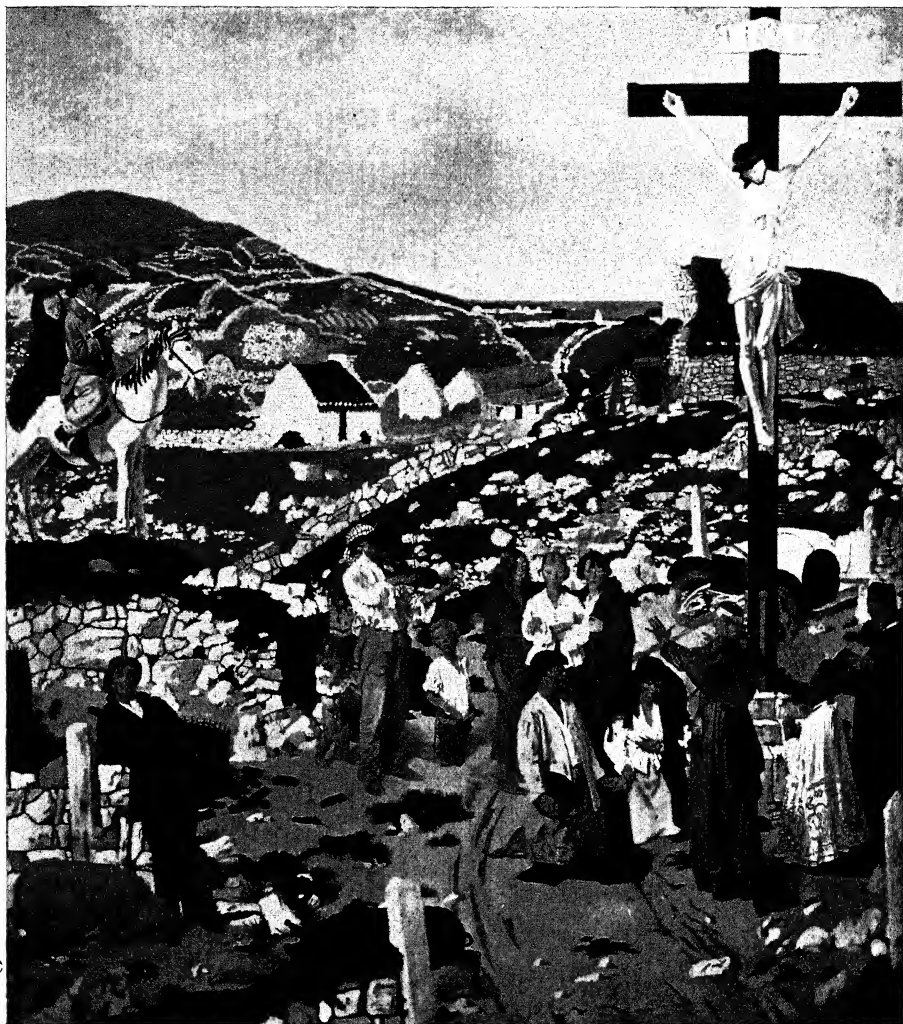


PLATE 20. THE IRISH WEDDING. (1914). Oil. Tokio.





PLATE 21. MISS LILY CARSTAIRS. (1915). Oil. *In the possession of Charles Carstairs, Esq.*



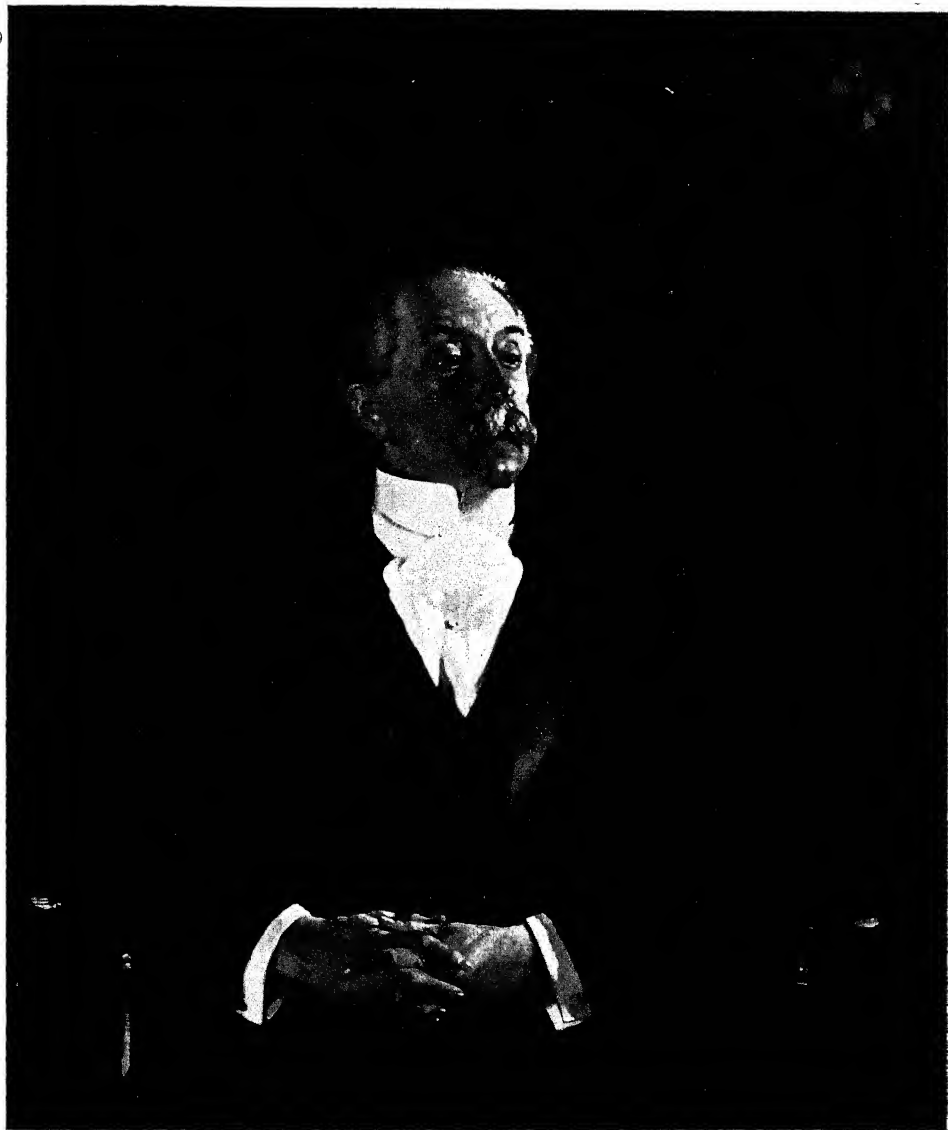


PLATE 22. THE LATE LORD SPENCER, K.G. (1916.) *Oil. At Althorp.*



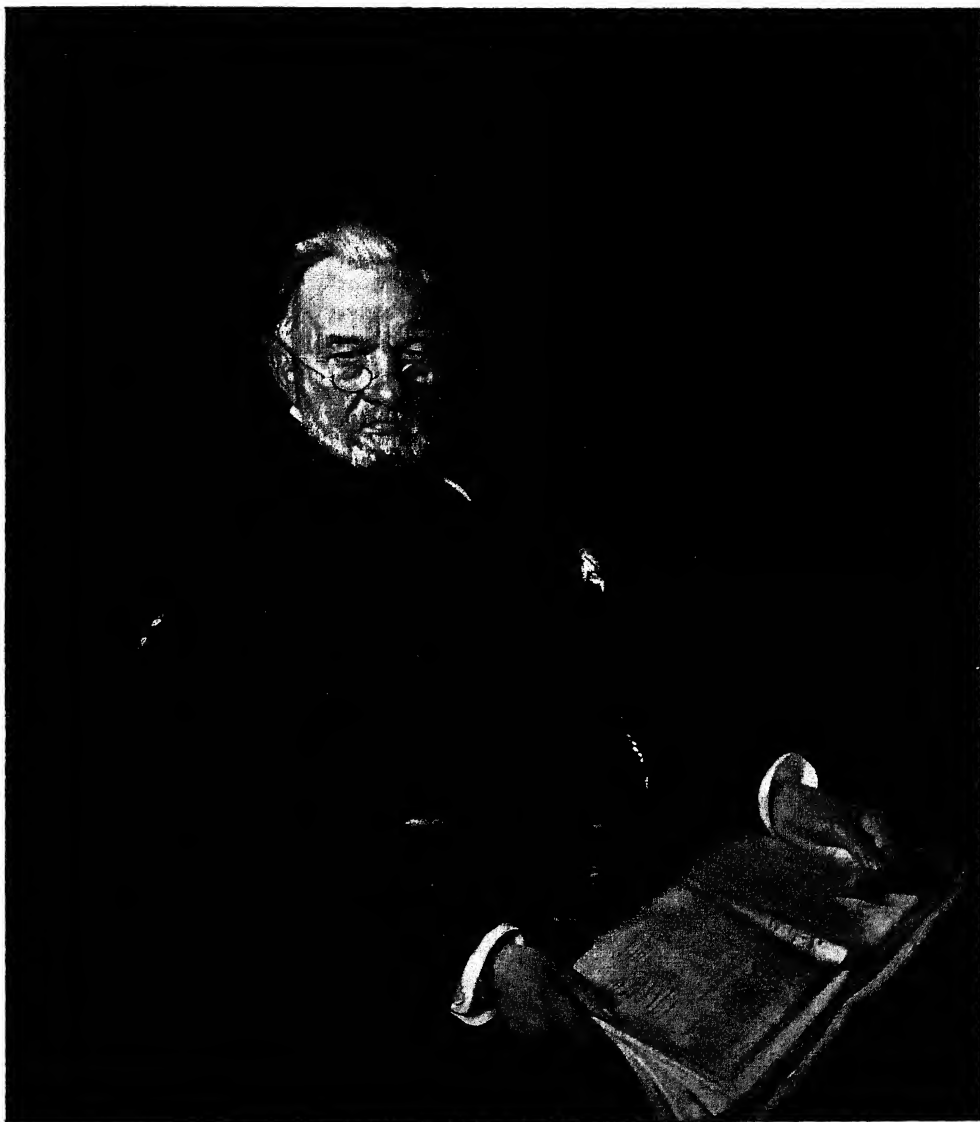


PLATE 23. JAMES LAW, ESQ. (OF THE "SCOTSMAN"). 1916.

*Oil. In the possession of the Family.*







PLATE 24. COLONEL ELKINGTON, D.S.O. (1916). (THE MAN WHO MADE GOOD).

*Oil. In the possession of Colonel Elkington.*





PLATE 25. FIELD-MARSHAL SIR HENRY WILSON. (1919).

*Oil. In the possession of Sir James Dunn, Bart.*





PLATE 26. THE SIGNING OF THE PEACE TREATY AT VERSAILLES. (1919-20).

*Oil. Imperial War Museum*



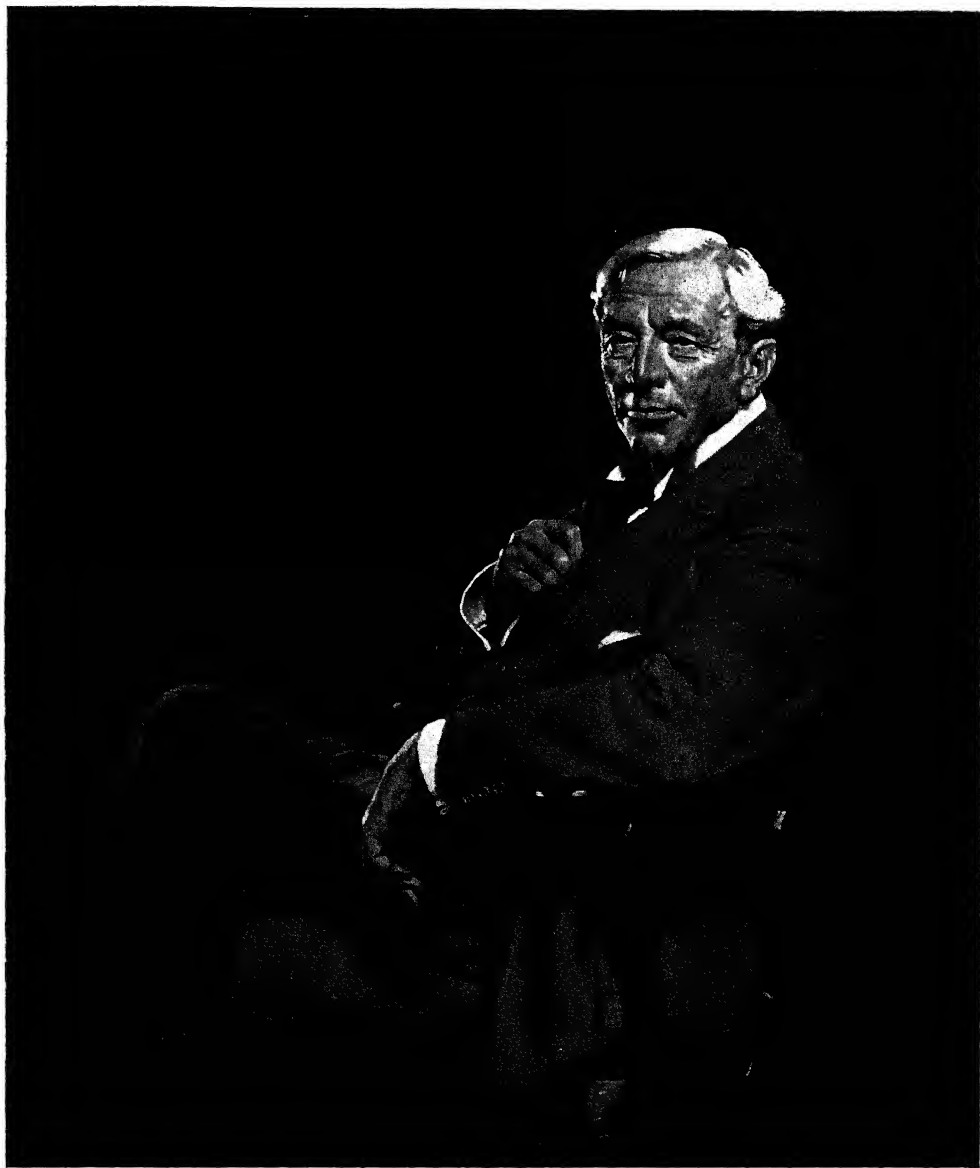


PLATE 27. SIR WILLIAM MCCORMICK. *Oil. National Gallery of British Art.*







PLATE 28. LORD BERKELEY. (1922). Oil. In the possession of Lord Berkeley.





PLATE 29. LORD GLENVY, EX-LORD CHANCELLOR OF IRELAND. (1922).

*Oil. In the possession of the Hon. Society of Gray's Inn*





PLATE 30. ROLAND KNOEDLER. (1922). Oil. *In the possession of Roland Knoedler, Esq.*





PLATE 31. SAMSON AND DELILAH. (1899).

*Pen, pencil, and wash drawing. In the possession of Professor Henry Tonks.*







PLATE 32. "LORD GEORGE HELL" (1901). Pencil and wash drawing. In the possession of Lady Orpen.



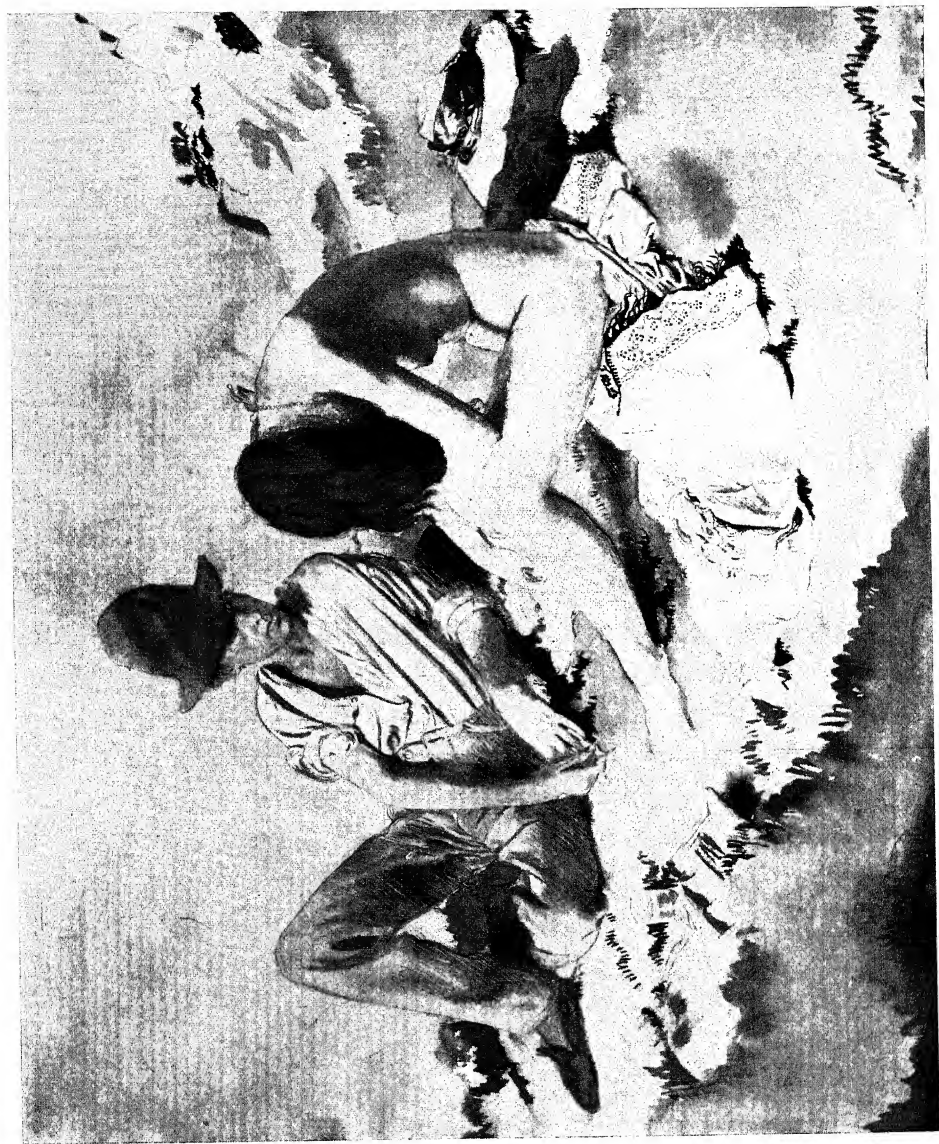


PLATE 33. THE OPEN-AIR LIFE CLASS. (1910). Pencil and wash drawing. Formerly in the possession of the late Alfred Rich, Esq.





PLATE 34. MR. RICH AND MODEL. (1911). *Pencil and wash drawing.* National Gallery of British Art.











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